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THE JOURNAL OF RACE DEVELOPMENT

Vol. 9

OCTOBER, 1918

No. 2

PAN-AMERICAN IDEALS AND THE WAR¹

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About thirty years ago a far-seeing statesman of this country convened at the city of Washington the first Pan-American Conference, and ever since our union has continued to grow. A better knowledge of each other has been developed and year by year our trade relations are gaining importance. To put on a more durable and solid basis our actual friendly relations let us try to study our national characteristics and ways of thinking, and by personal contact stimulate and develop the good-will amongst all our republics.

It is a glorious feeling to know that all through this continent the citizens of republican America are born free and equal, with all roads opened to them to attain the highest honors, power and wealth; where no man is insane enough to pretend a divine right to rule or claim any special privileges. We gladly bow to and respect superiority of mind, of moral qualities or persevering energy, but will never recognize artificial or autocratic distinctions or kingly domination.

The New World that has enriched mankind with such popular articles of food as potatoes, corn and other valuable products, is above all the promised land of equal opportunities, free to all men.

Popular government based on right and justice is the solid foundation of our political institutions. No matter how much one republic may differ from the other in power, size

¹ An address delivered at Springfield, Illinois, May 22, 1918.

or population, the sovereignty of each of them is and must be equally respected. We owe allegiance to the same flag; the flag of democracy and liberty. While consecrating all our devotion to our own country, we are at the same time members of one great commonwealth, working together for the progress and welfare of mankind. Inspired by the same ideals of equality, freedom and justice we advance with one common faith and spirit of charity towards the immortal culmination of our destiny. When we look back into the history of the world, we cannot but feel proud for having eliminated from the New World all kingly privileges and class distinctions and established instead the people's self government.

The invasion by northern hordes of barbaric tribes in the early centuries of the Christian era brought about the final disruption of the once great Roman Empire. Then as it is happening now, devastation and ruin followed their track. Civilization perished by the sword, and during many centuries Europe was the field of marauding feudal lords. Knowledge, science and culture disappeared and took refuge in the consecrated precincts of the monasteries. But in the fifteenth century, after the fall of Constantinople under the Turkish power, a great reaction took place in Western Europe, and a notable revival of learning followed: important inventions came into use, such as the printing press, the perfecting of the compass and the use of gun powder. The greatest event of all was the discovery of America by Columbus. It opened a new era in the history of the world.

Although the feudal period passed away, and with the formation of kingdoms a greater order and security came about, the fate of the people was very little improved. The kings considered their subjects as mere instruments for the satisfaction of the ambitious expanding of their dominion and power, and kept the countries of Europe in a constant state of unrest and war.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century a great political upheaval took place; the French people started a new and transcendental revolution for the recovery of human rights.

On May 5, 1789, the States General of France met and were inaugurated with the old pomp and solemnity. The king, the nobility, the clergy and the commons all took their places, and when the king sat down, the clergy and the nobility put their hats on; the commons against all precedent did the same thing. By that simple act they asserted the right of the people to an equal share in the government. The majesty of the Crown was to give place henceforth to the majesty of the Nation.

The great French Revolution marks a distinct epoch in the history of human liberty. Contemporaneously in the New World another revolution, less tragic and with no less far-reaching results took place. The English colonies of America refused to be taxed without their consent, and after a long and glorious struggle the United States of America became an independent nation. About the early part of the nineteenth century, inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution, and the example of the North American republic, the Spanish colonies of the New World proclaimed their independence, and finally democracy was established in all of them.

In this manner and by successive revolutions the right of self-government by the people and for the people became the recognized basis of authority.

It is to the lasting credit of the United States, the progress that is being made in the proper understanding of the meaning of democracy. The marvelous development in every branch of industry, the accumulation of wealth and the ceaseless activity of the American people have awakened the admiration of all the world, but these achievements represent, I would say, only the material side of the power of this country; there is another aspect to my mind of far more significance, and that is the growing consciousness amongst all classes, the press and public opinion,—which after all is the conscience of a democracy,—that the true greatness of a nation that aspires to the leadership of other nations, and has attained a commanding position such as the United States occupies, lies in the policy of invariable respect of right and the practice of justice, in all its dealings.

It seems to me that the number of people who wish to base the foreign policy of this country on the profits to be obtained,—sacrificing to that end the rights and the respect due to other countries, is becoming confined to a small number of unscrupulous speculators who, under the guise of national convenience, are willing to take advantage of any excuse whatsoever to use the power of the nation in a criminal policy of domineering over smaller nations. The reiterated declarations of President Wilson that the United States has no designs of conquest or aggrandisement at the expense of any nation, no matter how weak, has been received by the American public and the press as the true expression of the nation's policy.

The attitude of the United States in the actual world's conflict, confirms the high ideals which now inspire this Republic. In his admirable message asking Congress to declare war against Prussian militarism, President Wilson voiced in the following words the noble and generous sentiments of the American democracy:

Right is more precious than peace, and we shall fight for the things which we have carried nearest our hearts, for democracy, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for universal dominion of right by such concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free. To such task we can dedicate our lives and our fortunes, everything that we have with the pride of those who know that the day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is a fine epitome of the ideals that make this nation worthy to lead the world and be an example to all the republics of America to whom these declarations mean not only an assurance but an inspiration for justice and right.

Some time before the declaration of war by the United States, my country, answering the German notification of an unrestricted submarine warfare, declared that it could not and would not acquiesce in a policy so contrary to all the accepted principles of international law, and broke relations with Germany, stating at the same time that Bolivia made its policy one with the United States in this emergency.

When military autocracy challenges all accepted rights, tramples down the sacredness of treaties and by its incredible atrocities turns back to the practices of times when Christianity was unknown and fills full the measure of sorrow and misery of the inhabitants of the invaded territories, no neutrality, no peace is possible. The triumph of militarism would mean the end of all free nations. The revival of the dark night of medievalism in its most oppressive form: military force.

We must fight to the end trusting that this is the last fight for freedom and democracy; but we cannot lose sight of the new problems that are looming up for the readjustment of the economic conditions of the world. Let us hope that the same generous principles of justice, right and a proper regard for the welfare of mankind in general, will be the guiding light that will redress any wrongs and make the world a more attractive place to prepare ourselves for our higher and everlasting happiness.